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## A SUGGESTION IN REGARD TO STATE CONTROL IN THE DESIGN OF SMALL WATER WORKS<sup>1</sup>

BY FREDERIC BASS

Among the states where the health departments have developed strong departments of engineering or sanitation to carry out comprehensive laws governing the quality of public water supplies there has resulted, without doubt, a very distinct benefit to the public health. Many an epidemic which otherwise would have exacted a toll of suffering and death, has never had a chance to start. Engineers designing works have generally submitted their plans to the State Board of Health for standardization, so that they shall meet all of those requirements of design which have been found necessary and desirable for assuring to the public that a reliably safe water for domestic purposes shall be provided.

It is possible to trace a direct relation between such preventive measures and the death rate in the community concerned in many cases, and it might be possible to demonstrate the value of the sanitary supervision of water supplies to insurance companies, but no life insurance company has as yet been, so far as the author knows, an active agent in systematically encouraging the public to adopt preventive measures of this character.

When the engineer views the water works problem from the standpoint of a device for preventing the beginning and spread of fire he sees an entirely different attitude both on the part of the state and of the insurance interests. In this case the companies are awake, whereas the state is asleep, directly the opposite condition seen in sanitary control. In neither case are the two most interested parties working together.

The benefits of state sanitation have been demonstrated in raising the standard of quality of water supplies and it is fair to assume that state control of municipal fire-prevention measures would be equally valuable provided the work were done in the scientific manner that

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Minnesota Section.

sanitary control has been done. It might be argued that the fire departments, water works, building inspection and other factors involved in fire prevention be turned over to the fire insurance companies, so that unity of control might be accomplished and efficient protection secured, but so many political difficulties are obvious in such a plan that it does not appear feasible. Another plan more promising, which would meet the requirements of the case, would center in the state governments the responsibility for fixing standards of fire protection in cities, and among these the most important single item would be that of water supplies. A board which could control the entire design of public water supplies, and inspection of operation as well, would be desirable, in the author's opinion. The sanitary features are so well understood by sanitary engineers, bacteriologists and sanitary chemists, and there is so little of human physiology of character requiring a medical man, that in the event of general state control of water works, the board exercising it might well relieve the State Boards of Health of its control of water supply. On the other hand, the sanitary control might be left as it is, in the hands of the Board of Health, and the fire protection control be provided separately, in which case there should be some provision for unfailing coöperation between the two boards.

In England there has been for many years, a Local Government Board which advises municipalities in regard to financial problems, public health and housing problems, constructional problems and others, and in addition exercises considerable control over all, inasmuch as, subject to special Parliamentary Acts, it governs capital issues, in much the same way as did the Capital Issues Committee of the United States during the war.

An investigation into the feasibility of securing higher standards of design, construction and operation of public water supplies, whether by state control or otherwise, not only in regard to sanitary requirements, but in regard to economy and fire protection is worthy of the study of the American Water Works Association.